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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 007211

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/15/2016  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [KISL](#) [PINR](#) [SA](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD - SUCCESSFUL 9/12 MEETING  
WITH KING ABDULLAH

Classified By: Ambassador James C. Oberwetter for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S/NF) BEGIN SUMMARY. Ambassador Oberwetter and Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad called on the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud on September 12 to seek support on a range of issues relating to Iraq. The King expressed his concern about Iranian influence in Iraq, and Ambassador Khalilzad stated that the ongoing insurgency only furthers Iranian aspirations because it keeps Iraq weak and Coalition Forces (CF) are occupied in the West -- both serve Iranian interests. Ambassador Khalilzad outlined progress on issues such as legislation regarding the distribution of oil and natural gas resources and de-Ba'athification, militias, and resolution of the question of federalism. The King agreed to support a joint effort with the Kingdom, UAE, Jordan, and the U.S. to develop a strategy to stop the fighting and promote reconciliation, as well as increased cooperation between the SAG and Iraqi intelligence components on border control issues. The King acknowledged that the disparity in Hajj visa quotas for Iraq and Iran were based on "political considerations," and expressed continued support for U.S. efforts in Iraq. END SUMMARY.

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IRANIAN INFLUENCE IN IRAQ - THE KEY ISSUE  
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12. (S/NF) Ambassador Oberwetter and Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad called on the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud on September 12 to seek support on a range of issues relating to Iraq. The King began by noting the "turmoil" in Iraq and immediately raised the issue of Iran, asking whether Prime Minister (PM) Al Maliki had visited Iran. Ambassador Khalilzad conveyed that Al Maliki was currently making his first visit to Iran. Al Maliki intended to tell the Iranians that their economic assistance in Iraq was not needed. He said that, in addition to Iranian pressure on Al Maliki to make the visit, Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) head Abdul Aziz Al Hakim had pushed hard for it too. The King noted that it is clear Al Hakim's loyalties lie with Iran, despite his claims to be loyal to U.S. interests. Ambassador Khalilzad stated that Al Hakim's loyalty to Iran has never been in question, but that he (Al Hakim) also wants good relations with the U.S. The King suggested that U.S. support of Shi'a elements had led to the growth of power and influence of such individuals and entities as Al Hakim and SCIRI and created disincentives for Sunni participation in the political process. Ambassador Khalilzad recognized that there have

been mistakes on all sides, but pointed out that Sunni refusal to participate in the political process had helped to ensure Shi'a dominance in Iraq's nascent political institutions. He also emphasized that Sunni attacks on CF had further cemented this situation, pointing out that the Sunnis see CF presence as an "occupation," while the Shi'a and Kurds have taken advantage of that presence. He noted that 75 percent of CF operations are in Sunni areas because this is where the attacks are occurring. As a result, there is very little CF presence in the South -- creating an opportunity for greater Iranian influence. He emphasized that there are simply not enough forces to be equally present in the South when there remains a need to fight the insurgency in the West.

13. (S/NF) The King said that the Iranians recently conveyed to the SAG their concerns about border instability and weapons smuggling into Iran from Iraq, although it is widely known that it is the Iranians who are smuggling weapons into Iraq. Ambassador Khalilzad reiterated that Iran wants to keep Iraq weak so it cannot be a balancer against Iranian influence. Hence, the Sunnis are simply serving Iranian purposes by continuing to fight in the West. He asked for the King's support for a proposed joint effort with the intelligence chiefs of the Kingdom, UAE, Jordan, and the U.S. to develop a strategy to get Sunni insurgents to stop fighting. The King immediately agreed, noting that it is necessary for everyone to work together if the situation in Iraq is to improve. The King emphasized the importance of working together, as well as the fact that U.S. and KSA interests are one and the same. Ambassador Khalilzad agreed, expressing full confidence that PM Al Maliki would continue to work with the U.S. and Saudi Arabia to limit Iranian

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influence in Iraq and relating Al Maliki's position that he is an Arab, not a "pro-Iranian Shi'a." He urged the King to reach out to the Iraqi Shi'a to denounce their dependence on Iran.

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ASSISTANCE WITH BORDER CONTROL  
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14. (S/NF) Ambassador Khalilzad reiterated that Saudi assistance in mitigating the Iranian problem would be welcome. He asked the King whether it would be useful for Iraq to engage Syria directly in an effort to help "pull it away" from Iran, to which the King responded that Syria is really the secondary problem. (NOTE: The King's counselor and interpreter Adel Al Jubier called Ambassador Oberwetter twice after the meeting to clarify the point that the King views Iran as the principal problem. END NOTE.) Ambassador Khalilzad asked the King for assistance in helping Iraq to secure its borders with both Saudi Arabia and Iran. He passed to the King the PM's request that Chief of Intelligence Prince Muqrin bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud work with Iraqi counterparts to address this problem. The King agreed to the request, stating that stability in Iraq would facilitate stability in Jordan, Kuwait, and Syria as well -- although he pointed out that Syria is "blind" to what is in its own best interests.

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HAJJ VISAS  
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15. (C) Ambassador Khalilzad also addressed the issue of visas for the Hajj. According to President Talibani, the SAG gave Iraq 30,000 visas, while the Iranians received 100,000. However, the President contends that, at approximately 70 million, the population of Iran is not three times greater than that of Iraq (approximately 26 million). The King responded that the quotas were determined for "political reasons" and emphasized the hope that the Iraqis would equitably distribute the visas among the Shi'a and Sunnis.

The King also expressed concern that the Iranians are using their quota for domestic political purposes (awarding to members of the Revolutionary Guard and their families). As a result, the SAG is requiring that visas to men be issued only to those who are 55 and older.

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POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS  
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¶6. (S/NF) Describing some of the positive developments in Iraq, Ambassador Khalilzad noted that there are new laws in the works addressing the development of oil and gas resources, as well as de-Ba'athification. He also recounted the debate regarding whether the "Arab" part of Iraq should be federalized, noting that the Iranians are pushing for this to happen -- and soon. He said the U.S. is working with the Iraqis to deal with the issue of militias and pushing for a specific timeline for a decision on this and related problems on which the Iraqis are divided. He emphasized that, without agreement on all these issues, there will not be a stable Iraq. He stated that the U.S. would use its influence to ensure that the end results are reasonable, possibly taking the decision-makers to an off-site location in order to effect a "package deal." He responded to the King's statement that federalism will not succeed in Iraq by noting that the U.S. will advocate that any decision on federalism be pushed to a later date, pointing out that Al Maliki himself thinks that, at a time when it is imperative for Iraqis to unite, a debate on federalism would polarize them instead.

¶7. (C) Ambassador Khalilzad thanked the King for his support regarding the recent Abu Dhabi meeting on the Iraq Compact and noted the upcoming ministerial in New York on September 18 in which Foreign Minister Saud Al Faisal has been invited to participate. The King closed the meeting by reaffirming the SAG's commitment to U.S. priorities regarding Iraq and said that, despite the occasional dissenting voice, the Saudis are loyal to the U.S.

¶8. (U) This cable has been cleared by Ambassador Khalilzad.  
OBERWETTER